

„Look at what they're doing here tonight“

The November pogrom in Meimbressen 1938

by Michael Dorhs

November 9, 1938 was a Wednesday. In regards to the weather, it was a normal late autumn day in Meimbressen with a cloudy sky and temperatures around ten degrees. But it was far from being a normal day.

Two days earlier, the only 17-years-old Herschel Grynszpan from a Polish-Jewish family in Hanover, out of despair over the forced deportation of his parents to Poland, had carried out a deadly assassination attempt on the German embassy secretary Ernst vom Rath in Paris. The news were immediately broadcast over the radio to the furthest corners of the German Reich,¹ using Grynszpan's assassination as a pretense for long-planned pogroms against German Jews. As early as November 8, the „Kurahessische Landeszeitung“, the official Nazi party newspaper of the NSDAP in the region of Kassel, reported on the front page about the alleged „*spontaneous anger of the people*“ in Kassel and other places in Northern Hesse.² There and in Rotenburg and Bebra, on the afternoon of November 7, Nazi sympathizers and members of the SA and SS in civilian clothes, but „*all with the same boots*“ (according to an eyewitness from Kassel),³ had gathered to protest against Jewish places of worship, to use violence against facilities and homes and to loot Jewish-owned businesses. This was the start of the pogroms against Jews throughout the Reich in November 1938! It doesn't take much imagination to know that the news from Kassel about relatives and friends living there quickly found their way to Meimbressen. Of course the Jewish families in the village

¹ Cf. Wolfgang Prinz, Die Judenverfolgung in Kassel. In: Wilhelm Frenz, Jörg Kammler, Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar (Eds.), Volksgemeinschaft und Volksfeinde. Kassel 1933-1945. Vol. 2: Studies. Fulda, Hesse GmbH, 1987, p. 193.

² The complete article is available as Doc. No. 5 in Wolf-Arno Kropat, „Reichskristallnacht“. Der Judenpogrom vom 7. bis 10. November 1938 - Urheber, Täter, Hintergründe. Wiesbaden 1997, p. 204f.

³ Wolf-Arno Kropat (see annotation No. 2), p. 56.

were concerned, especially since there had been similar incidents in neighboring Zierenberg on the night of November 7.⁴



Synagogue and School building in Meimbressen 1928 / Photo: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Hessen (Marburg)

On November 9 it overtook Meimbressen.⁵ Towards evening, not long after the sun had set at 4:45 p.m.⁶ – individual testimonies also only mention 7:00 p.m. or 8:00 p.m. – „an outrageous crowd gathered in front of the synagogue there.“⁷ (Hugo Humburg). The numbers vary, there are said to have been around a hundred people,⁸ among them the Meimbressen HJ and BDM members as well as those of the SA „and

⁴ Cf. Wolf-Arno Kropat (see annotation No. 2), p. 60.

⁵ An exact dating is not possible until today. There are a few isolated indications that the pogrom night in Meimbressen could have begun earlier, but from a source-critical point of view, these must be regarded as unreliable. Thus, Manfred Vorenberg reported that already on „(...) November 7, 1939 [sic!] (...) the furniture of my parents was smashed and the house (was) demolished (...)“ HHStAW, Bestand 518, Bd. 42483. And Heinrich Lecke spoke of November 8, 1938 in his testimony before the Spruchkammer on March 6, 1947, when „I (came) back from Ehrsten to Meimbressen at dusk. I already heard fanfare sounds and signals from afar (...)“ HHStAW, Bestand 520, 22 No. 20152. The indictment against Max Groß also mentions that he „as a convinced supporter of the Nazi tyranny (...) actively participated in the riots against the Jews, destruction of the synagogue and the Jewish property on November 8, 1938;“ HHStAW, Bestand 520, 22 No. 20152: Klageschrift des Hess. Staatsministeriums gegen Max Groß, dated 6.3.1947.

⁶ Cf. Heimatkalender für den Kreis Hofgeismar 1938, ed. by Kreis Ausschuss, without place name <Hofgeismar> without year <1937>, p. 14.

⁷ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 32: Zeugenaussage des Korbmachers Hugo Humburg, dated 4.3.1947.

⁸ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar, dated 18. März 1947, statement by Fritz Neutze.

other civilians".⁹ (Fritz Neutze) In addition to the local Nazi party organizations, individual SA and NSDAP members from Fürstenwald, Ehrsten and Weimar were also represented „*in civilian clothes*".¹⁰ Meimbressen itself did not have an independent HJ formation, but was part of a unit encompassing several villages. The leader who was responsible for the Meimbressen HJ lived elsewhere and had a representative in the village, Erich Dilcher, who was only 18 at the time.

Wilhelm Rumpf (1900-1944), local peasant leader and SA troop leader, plays a central role in the question of who gave the decisive impetus for the pogrom. It was he who either gave Erich Dilcher the order himself or sent it through a third person that he should call the Meimbresser HJ members to the bridge at the synagogue within a short period of time. They were told straight away what it was about. „*You are now on duty and report to the SA. Now it's up against the Jews.*"¹¹ (Wilhelm Rumpf). And according to Max Groß, one of the main perpetrators with regard to the concrete destruction inside the synagogue and in several houses of Jewish families, it was also Wilhelm Rumpf who, as a member of the SA, asked him to take part in the riots against the Jews.¹² In addition, it emerges from the interrogations in the course of the tribunal proceedings after World War II that Karl Lecke, who for some time later held the office of mayor of Meimbressen during the wartime years, was one of the key leaders of the November pogrom in Meimbressen.

What is indisputable for Kassel also applies to Meimbressen. Similar to the neighboring city, the desecration of the synagogue and the destruction and looting of Jewish homes „*have taken their starting point from the region and the villages themselves.*"¹³ (Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar) Contrary to the long-held legend that the pogrom against the Jews in 1938 was ordered centrally by those responsible for the

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 18039: Spruchkammerakte Wilhelm Rumpf, Aussage Erich Dilcher, dated 23.2.1948.

¹¹ HHStAW, 520, 22, Nr. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46: Aussage von Erich Dilcher, without date <1947>.

¹² Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46: Testimony of Max Gross, dated 21.2.1947.

¹³ Dietfrid Krause-Vilmar, Die judenfeindlichen Pogrome in Kassel im November 1938. In: ZHG 117/118 (2012/13), p. 205.

Nazi dictatorship and was carried out „like everywhere else in the Reich“, it is necessary to finally look at regional or local responsibility for the crimes. During the Spruchkammer proceedings against active Nazis after the end of the war, the assumption of personal responsibility for the anti-Semitic excesses was, as a rule, completely rejected on the local level through mutual exculpatory statements by the accused and their entourage. Irrespective of this, it should be noted that the names of important protagonists of the Jew pogrom in Meimbressen Gustav und Georg Brede, Erich Dilcher, Max Groß, Karl Lecke, Christian und Konrad Lecke, Fritz Niemeyer (Calden) Wilhelm Rumpf und Willi Schindewolf were no secret among the residents, even if they liked to play down the degree of their personal responsibility and blame one on the other. The view that was still common at the beginning of the 2000s, that the perpetrators came mainly from outside („rolling command“) and only very few Meimbressers took part in the pogrom,¹⁴ can only be seen as a protective claim due to the clear historical source situation today.

Shortly after the end of the war, the precise chronological sequence of events on November 9 and 10, 1938 was no longer to be reconstructed with certainty. But considering all the different statements by those involved and those affected, a differentiated picture of the persecution and destruction measures in Meimbressen emerges.



Marga Goldwein 1949 / Photo: Collections Arolsen Archives

Apparently, some members of the HJ and the SA had already attacked Jewish homeowners on their way to the synagogue. The leaders called on the HJ to „*throw stones at the houses of the Meimbressen Jews and smash the furniture in the apartments. You could hear the shouts, 'Beat them dead!' and other shouts.*“¹⁵ (Anna Lohne) The fear of those affected was correspondingly great. „*I went*

¹⁴ Cf. Eberhard Wolff von Gudenberg, Meimbressen, die Wölffe von Gudenberg und die Juden. Die besondere Geschichte eines hessischen Dorfes. In: Dorfchronik Meimbressen. Festschrift zur 1100-Jahrfeier 2006. Mit Beiträgen von Eberhard Wolff von Gudenberg, Norbert Rumpf, Heinrich Neutze u.v.a.m. Meimbressen / Hofgeismar 2006, p. 86.

¹⁵ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 18039: Spruchkammerakte Wilhelm Rumpf, Meimbressen: Aussage Anna Lohne, Meimbressen No. 94, dated 1948.

*into the garden behind the house with my parents and my grandmother. (...) After we had spent the night in the garden, my parents, my grandmother and I went to Kassel and found accommodation there with Levi [Goldwein] on Moltkestrasse.*¹⁶ (Marga Goldwein) Gustav Katz, who happened to be there that day, uncle of Marga Goldwein, was prevented from entering the house of his sister Berta Goldwein, née Katz and her husband Louis, by one of Max Groß' daughters, who was being followed by a large crowd of people, and instead was forced to leave the village immediately.¹⁷

The apartments and business premises of Levi Goldwein I [house no. 43], Jakob Frankenberg [house no. 52] and Louis Goldwein [house no. 2] were broken in and devastated. *„I went into the house of Louis Goldwein. There I already met the bed springs in the front door. Objects were lying around everywhere and were smashed.*¹⁸ (Adam Giessler) Some, like Jakob Frankenberg and his wife Röschen, née Kander, were lucky because they weren't in their house at the time of the attack.¹⁹ Their business was plundered anyway. A year later, Max Groß is said to have sold the stolen soap from Jakob Frankenberg's warehouse.²⁰

A large crowd had gathered at the synagogue. The locked door was broken open by Karl Lecke, *„and now all the people poured in.*²¹ (Fritz Neutze). All movable objects were smashed and a „sacrifice box“ – presumably a collection box set up for the benefit of Jewish welfare – was plundered.²²

¹⁶ HHStAW, 520,22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Aussage von Marga Goldwein, dated 21.7.1946

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁸ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 30: Aussage von Adam Giessler, dated 28.2.1947.

¹⁹ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Aussage von Heinrich Lecke

²⁰ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Aussage von Adam Giessler, dated 28.2.1947.

²¹ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 21: Aussage von Fritz Neutze, without date <1947>.

²² *Ibid.*



Interior of the Meimbressen synagogue in 1928 / Photo: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege Hessen (Marburg)

The large ceiling chandelier was torn down, thrown outside and smashed there.²³ One of the Torah scrolls was pulled apart and dragged through the dirt.²⁴ A fire was lit in front of the synagogue building, into which many of the objects (e.g. religious books, Torah scrolls, also some benches) were thrown in which the members of the SA and the HJ had dragged outside. Max Groß played a central role in the destruction of the synagogue inventory. In the synagogue he had found a black robe that he wore when he kept throwing new objects into the fire. *„He went back into the synagogue (...) and then came out with a long scroll, probably a scroll of the law, and threw it into the fire. Apparently it didn't want to burn, so he took it out and tore it into two parts.“*²⁵ (Adam Giessler) In another witness statement it is noted that the Torah scrolls were

²³ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 32a: Aussage von Karl Dilcher, dated 6.3.1947.

²⁴ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 32: Zeugenaussage des Korbmachers Hugo Humburg, dated 4.3.1947.

²⁵ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 30: Aussage von Adam Giessler, dated 28.2.1947.

thrown into the Nebelbeeke, the small stream that flows by, because they were hardly flammable.²⁶ At that time, the Jewish community of Meimbressen owned a total of five Torah scrolls, four of them were desecrated in connection with the pogrom against the Jews.²⁷ In accordance with religious regulations they are said to have been buried in secret later by members of the Jewish community at the Jewish cemetery.²⁸ Only one Torah scroll could be saved and taken to Kassel for safekeeping by the local Jewish community by the head of the Meimbressen Jews Jakob Frankenberg († 1943 in the Theresienstadt ghetto).²⁹

In the cemetery itself, numerous tombstones were violently knocked over and embedded plaques with the personal life data of those who were buried there were broken out and smashed.³⁰

It is also testified that the Nazi perpetrators seriously considered setting fire to the synagogue building themselves, but then decided against this idea. The fact that (christian!) „civilians“ (Max Groß) still lived in the building, presumably in the former apartment of teacher Herbold Löwenstein, who should not come to harm, is said to have played a role here.³¹ At the time, the farmer Adam Giessler and his seven-year-old son Heinrich observed the destruction of the synagogue from the neighboring property and told him: *„Look at what they are doing here tonight. If information is to be provided about this later and I shouldn't be there anymore, don't forget about this.“*³²

²⁶ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 32a: Aussage von Karl Dilcher, dated 6.3.1947.

²⁷ Cf. HHStAW, 518, No. 1327: Schreiben von Adolf Goldwein an die JRSO, dated 26.8.1952.

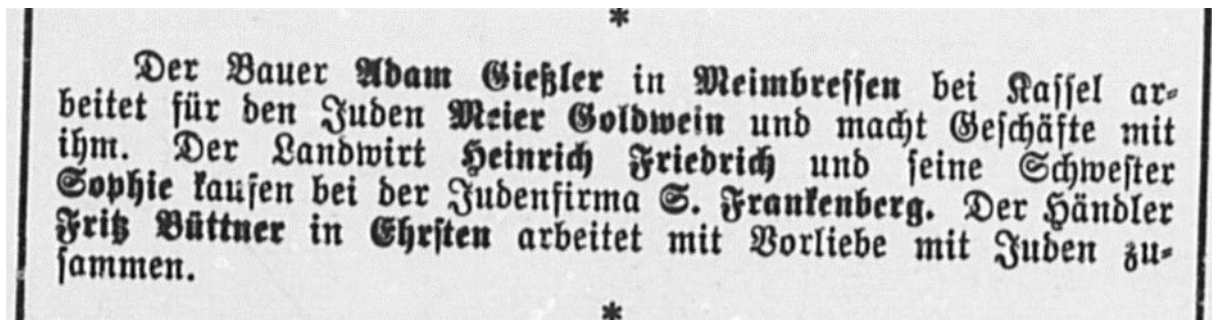
²⁸ Oral communication from Eberhard Wolff v. Gudenberg (1924-2006), Meimbressen, to Michael Dorhs (Hofgeismar), dated 1983.

²⁹ Cf. HHStAW 518, 1327: Schreiben von Adolf Goldwein an die JRSO, dated 26.8.1952.

³⁰ HStAM, 180 Hofgeismar, 3524: Auskunft des Bürgermeisters von Meimbressen an den Landrat in Hofgeismar, dated 22.5.1946

³¹ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 32: Zeugenaussage des Korbmachers Hugo Humburg, dated 4.3.1947.

³² HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 30: Aussage von Adam Giessler, dated 28.2.1947.



One year earlier, Giessler himself had come under scrutiny of anti-Jewish agitators when they wrote in the fanatically anti-Semitic weekly „Der Stürmer“ in the notorious column „*Brief News - What the people can't understand*“ that he worked „*for the Jew Meier Goldwein*“ and did business with him.³³

After the desecration of the synagogue, the mob moved „*to the small village (...) from one Jewish house to the other.*“³⁴ (Erich Dilcher). Apparently, they first went to the house of Adolf and Bina Vorenberg, née Goldwein [house no. 72], which was directly opposite Adam Giessler's house. „*Here they came before closed doors. My son and I saw someone climb in the window that was smashed first. Then someone opened the door, and a large crowd went inside the house. (...) Immediately afterwards I heard the clinking of porcelain and other objects, then I heard Vohrenberg [sic!] utter pitiful screams. (...) I only heard later that he was said to have been beaten (...) and put under a baking trough.*“³⁵ (Adam Giessler) After World War II, the then mayor testified as an eyewitness to the events of the November pogrom in 1938 that indeed a large part of her apartment furnishings had been smashed „*in part quite substantially*“.³⁶ The crowd then went to Bertha Hirschberg's house [house no. 44], widow of the deceased merchant Siegfried Hirschberg (1896-1926), and forced entry into a room in which several Jewish women had barricaded themselves. „*Everything that was in the room*

³³ Cf. Der Stürmer No. 19/1937.

³⁴ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 26: Zeugenaussage des Erich Dilcher, without date.

³⁵ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 30: Aussage von Adam Giessler, dated 28.2.1947.

³⁶ Cf. HHStAW, 518, No. 42483: Letter from the mayor of Meimbressen to the Regierungspräsidium [d.i. Regional Council] in Kassel, dated 17.11.1962.

was (...) digged through."³⁷ (Hugo Humburg) It is not known whether the women were also beaten. The violent demolitions ended late in the evening of November 9 around 9:00 p.m.³⁸ or 10:00 p.m.³⁹

However, the pogrom in Meimbressen was not the end. The statements in the files of the tribunal („Spruchkammerakten“) show that the destruction and theft of Jewish property continued on the evening of the following day, a Thursday. Apparently, the Calden miller Fritz Neutze stood out in particular, who came to Meimbressen by car together with other SA members from Calden⁴⁰ in order to „*smash what had meanwhile been provisionally repaired again.*“⁴¹ (Karl Dilcher). The buildings that were no longer habitable included the residential and commercial building of the cattle dealer Leopold Goldwein [house no. 21]. He lived there with his mother Bertha, née Frankenberg, who had been a widow since 1928. The house was not only plundered,⁴² but „*heavy stones, wagon tongues and other objects (...) were used to destroy what was still reasonably intact.*“⁴³ (Flory Jacobs, née Goldwein). Among other things, a sewing machine „*and other good furniture parts*“ were thrown out of the first floor window.⁴⁴

Leopold's younger sister Julie was also affected by this destruction. After the death of her father Jacob Goldwein, she set up a room in her parents' house as a shop for manufactured goods and groceries, but she also visited her customers in the

³⁷ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 32: Zeugenaussage des Korbmachers Hugo Humburg, dated 4.3.1947.

³⁸ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 21: Aussage Fritz Neutze, without date.

³⁹ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152, Bl. 14: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46: Aussage von Max Gross, dated 21.2.1947.

⁴⁰ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152, Bl. 21: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Aussage von Fritz Neutze, without date, Bl. 14: Aussage von Max Gross, dated 21.2.1947, Bl. 30: Aussage von Adam Giessler, dated 28.2.1947.

⁴¹ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Spruch gegen den Melker Max Groß, Meimbressen No. 46, Bl. 32a: Aussage von Karl Dilcher, dated 6.3.1947.

⁴² Cf. HHStAW, 518, No. 57467 [Selma Bergenstein, née Goldwein]: United Restitution Organization (URO), Frankfurt/M., to the Regierungspräsidium [d.i. Regional Council] in Kassel, dated 17.5.1957.

⁴³ HHStAW, 520, 22, No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947, Bl. 8: Aussagen von Flori [sic!] Jacobs, geb. Goldwein und Marga Goldwein, dated 21.7.1946.

⁴⁴ HHStAW, 518, No. 57474: Mayor of Meimbressen to the Regierungspräsidium [d.i. Regional Council] in Kassel, dated 30.12.1958.

villages around Meimbressen in horse-drawn carriages.⁴⁵ When her niece Ilse, daughter of her sister Selma Bergenstein, née Goldwein, who was married to Marburg, wanted to flee „to the countryside“ to Meimbressen under the impression of the antisemitic violent excesses in her hometown, she immediately received the news from Meimbressen that as a result of the anti-Jewish riots on November 10, the aunt's grocery store was completely „broken“. „*You'd best stay in Marburg. The sugar runs down our stairs.*“⁴⁶ (Julie Goldwein)

When the members of the SA from Calden and their like-minded people from Meimbressen had finished their work of destruction in the late evening of November 10, the synagogue building and the numerous houses of Jewish families presented a picture of devastation. „*There were houses in which there was no whole cup left, and some of their owners didn't know where to hide.*“⁴⁷ (Hartmut Rau) Only a few Christian neighbors had helped— at least secretly – the mentally deeply disturbed and materially ruined Jews, especially some men and women of an evangelical free church.⁴⁸

For the Jewish families remaining in the village, who had been unable or unwilling to emigrate, there was now no doubt that they no longer had any prospects for life in Meimbressen. Little by little they all left their home village to hide in the supposed anonymity of larger cities with friends or relatives. Jakob and Röschen Frankenberg, among others, fled to Kassel on the night of November 9/10, 1938, where they first found shelter at Schillerstraße 9 with Louis Kander, Röschen's brother.⁴⁹ Louis and Bertha Goldwein, together with their daughters Marga and Ruth, also fled to Kassel the next morning.⁵⁰ Adolf and Bina Vorenberg with their daughter Hannelore, on the other hand, did not receive a permit to move to Kassel and therefore moved to

⁴⁵ Cf. HHStAW, 518, No. 57473: Affidavit Minna Rosenblatt, née Goldwein, dated 15.2.1960.

⁴⁶ http://www.garten-des-gedenkens.de/?page_id=147&lang=DE

⁴⁷ Oral communication from Hartmut Rau (1921-1998), Meimbressen, to Michael Dorhs, Hofgeismar, dated 27.12.1983.

⁴⁸ Oral communication from Heinrich Rumpf (1907-1985), Meimbressen, to Michael Dorhs, Hofgeismar, dated 18.8.1983.

⁴⁹ Cf. HHStAW, 518, No. 13765: statement by Karl Jehuda Frankenberg, dated 22.10.1959.

⁵⁰ Cf. HHStAW, 520, 22 No. 20152: Spruchkammerakte Max Hermann Groß: Protokoll der öffentlichen Sitzung der Spruchkammer Hofgeismar v. 18. März 1947: Aussage von Marga Goldwein.

Frankfurt/M..⁵¹ It is known of Bertha Goldwein, née Frankenberg, the mother of Leopold and Julie, among others, that after the November Pogrom she first fled to her daughter Selma Bergenstein in Marburg, where she remained until her daughter's emigration.⁵² She then lived with three of her eight children, Leopold, Julie and Johanna, in Kassel at Kaiserstrasse (today Goethestrasse) 13.⁵³ They were all deported from their only seemingly safer places of refuge from 1941 onwards and murdered in the ghettos and extermination camps set up by the Germans.

A first „assessment“ of the November pogrom in the Hofgeismar region was made just a few days after it ended. On November 17, 1938, the SS Rottenführer Christian from Hofgeismar reported to the SD subsection Kassel in a letter that could hardly be surpassed in terms of contempt for human beings about the „Judenaktion“ in the district of Hofgeismar. To his regret, he had to state that in the entire district only the synagogue in Meimbressen had been „demolished“, since the other two synagogue buildings in Hofgeismar and Grebenstein had already *„passed over to Aryan hands beforehand, so that a destruction was not appropriate here.“*⁵⁴ The desecration of at least the Jewish cemetery in Meimbressen remains completely unmentioned. Christian falsely claimed in his letter that only eight commercial buildings had been demolished in the entire district and that the windows had only been broken in three private apartments.⁵⁵ The Meimbresser testimonies alone about the events in the village on November 9 and 10, 1938 show that the total number of Jewish households affected must have been significantly higher, since there were also violent anti-Jewish riots in Grebenstein and Hofgeismar at the same time.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Cf. database of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt/M. and HHStAW, 518, No. 42483.

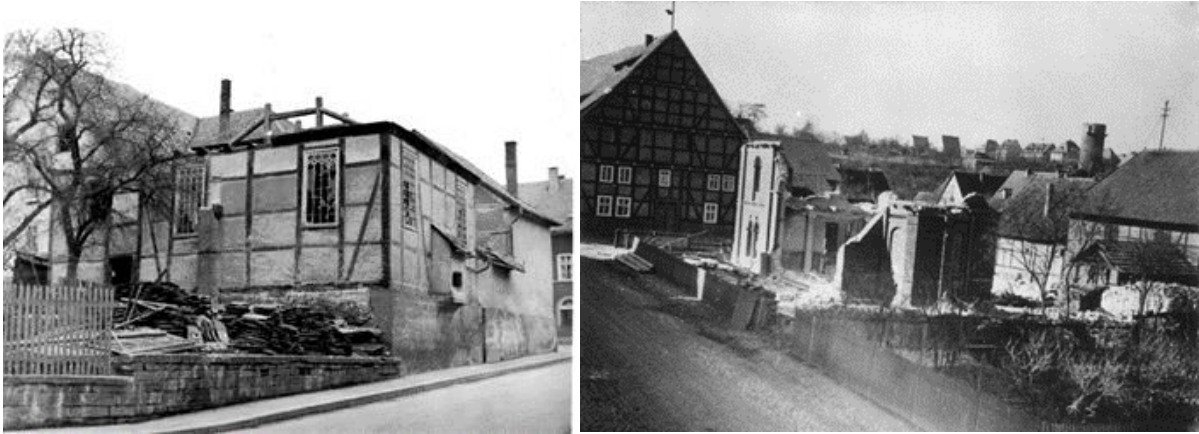
⁵² Cf. HHStAW, 518, No. 57467.

⁵³ Cf. Wolfgang Matthäus, Kaiserstraße 13. Geschichten vom jüdischen Leben und seiner Zerstörung im Vorderen Westen, in Kassel und der Region. Kassel 2014, pp. 146-151.

⁵⁴ Reprinted in Helmut Burmeister / Michael Dorhs (Eds.), Fremde im eigenen Land. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden in den alten Kreisen Hofgeismar, Kassel, Wolfhagen und in der Stadt Kassel. Hofgeismar 1985, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid*, p. 76.

⁵⁶ Cf. on individual victims of the November 1938 pogrom from Hofgeismar and Grebenstein Michael Dorhs: „Suchet der Stadt Bestes...“ (Jer. 29,7) - Zur Geschichte der Jüdischen Gemeinde Hofgeismar 1933-1945. In: H. Burmeister / M. Dorhs (Eds.), Suchet der Stadt Bestes. Die jüdische Gemeinde Hofgeismars zwischen Assimilation und Untergang. Hofgeismar 1990, pp. 7-49.-- same: Nachbarn, die keiner mehr kennt... Schicksale jüdischer Familien aus Grebenstein. In: Jahrbuch 1998 Landkreis Kassel, pp. 119-130; republished in: H.



Demolition of the synagogue buildings in Hofgeismar 1939 (l.) and Grebenstein (r.) / Photos: Stadtmuseum Hofgeismar, Abt. Judaica Hassiaca

Burmeister / M. Dorhs (Eds.), Das achte Licht. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Juden in Nordhessen. Hofgeismar 2002, pp. 143-166;-- Julia Drinnenberg: Stätten der Erinnerung – Gedächtnis einer Stadt. Die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus in Hofgeismar. Hofgeismar 2010.

Hofgeismar, den 17. November 1938.

An den
SD-Unterabschnitt,
K a s s e l .

Betrifft: Judenaktion.

Vorgang: Ihr Schr. v. 14. Nov. 1938. II/112 SR 287/38
Ko./Su.

Ihr Schreiben vom 14. ds. Mts. gelangte erst heute
in meinen Besitz, da ich einige Tage verreist war, sodaß ich
termingemäß leider die Angelegenheit nicht bearbeiten konnte.
Ich bitte dies zu entschuldigen.

- 13113
1/1
1938*
- Handwritten notes on left margin:
Hofgeismar
Spinn
Hofgeismar*
- 2*
- Zu 1) Im hiesigen Kreis wurde nur die Synagoge in Meimbressen demoliert. Leider waren die Synagogen in Hofgeismar und Grebenstein vorher in arische Hände übergegangen, sodaß hier eine Zerstörung nicht am Platze war.
 - Zu 2) Im Kreis Hofgeismar wurden insgesamt 8 Geschäftshäuser demoliert. Außerdem wurde noch an 3 Privatwohnungen die Scheiben eingeworfen. Der Gesamtschaden der Demolierung im Kreis beträgt nach vorläufiger Schätzung ca. RM 4 200.- (Rücksprache mit Versicherungsgesellschaften wurde nicht genommen).
 - Zu 3) In einigen Fällen wurden den Juden der Arsch gehauen, die als besonders Übel bekannt waren. Am anderen Tag mußten Sie dann mit blauen Augen und schmerzenden Gliedern die Straßen reingehen.
 - Zu 4) Zu Plünderungen ist es im hiesigen Kreis nicht gekommen.
 - Zu 5) Im hiesigen Kreis wurden insgesamt 7 Juden in Haft genommen.
 - Zu 6) Kultgegenstände sowie Archivmaterial wurden nicht sicher gestellt. Es ist zum größten Teil verbrannt worden oder vernichtet. Dafür aber wurden die Geschäftsbücher der Juden beschlagnahmt, die noch von zuständiger Stelle überprüft werden.
 - Zu 7) Zu Selbstmorden oder sonstigen Todesfällen unter den Juden ist es in dieser Zeit leider nicht gekommen.
 - Zu 8) Es ist geplant die demolierte Synagoge in Meimbressen umzubauen und für einige Wohnungen auszubauen. Die restlichen Geschäfts- bzw. Wohnhäuser sind bzw. schon bzw. gegen noch in arischen Besitz über.

Heil Hitler!

Christian
SS Rottenführer.

Photo: Stadtmuseum Hofgeismar / Abt. Judaica Hassiaca

The inhumane, callous attitude towards the Jews as enemies of the so-called „Volksgemeinschaft“ propagated by the Nazis is also shown through Christian's letter, something that many people were wrongly unaware of for a long time: The pogroms in November 1938 were not aimed primarily to the Germany-wide destruction of at

least 1,400 Jewish places of worship. In this regard, the often chosen title of books, films or events „*The night when the synagogues burned*“ falls short. The focus of the events of the November pogrom in 1938 was the humiliation, abuse and plundering of Jewish men, women and children and the destruction of their material livelihoods throughout the Reich, including Meimbressen. This was visible to everyone concerning the approximately 7,000 Jewish shops that were set on fire and looted in the German Reich and in the countless destroyed apartments with their inventory. Well over 1,300 people died during or as a direct result of the riots.



Herbold Löwenstein / Photo: Judaica in Meimbressen e.V.



Louis Goldwein / Photo: Stadtarchiv Kassel

Over 30,000 Jewish men were deported to the Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald concentration camps. Among them were the former Jewish teacher Herbold Löwenstein from Meimbressen († 1944 in the Theresienstadt ghetto) and the merchants Adolf († 1954 in New York) and Louis Goldwein († 1944 in the Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp). Another Jew from Meimbressen, Levi Goldwein I († 1941 in Kassel), only escaped this fate because Goldwein's mayor and schoolmate at the time, Heinrich Rumpf, made sure „*that my father was not taken with him and could stay at home.*“ (Irmgard Stern, née Goldwein). In Meimbressen, too, the violence and brutality of the November pogrom made it clear to anyone who wanted to see what the anti-Jewish ideology and policies of the Nazis were aiming at: the complete elimination of the Jewish minority from the non-Jewish majority society and their systematic annihilation.

Translation: Marike Dorhs

Further reading

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